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FBI asked to probe closed-hearing leak

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WASHINGTON — Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., has asked the FBI to try to find out who leaked classified information to the press about a pending federal judgeship nomination, a committee spokesman said yesterday.

Committee press secretary Mark Goodin said Thurmond was "extremely concerned" about a story in the Oct. 24 Washington Times that gave detailed information about the committee's closed-door examination of CIA official Stanley Sporkin, whom President Reagan has nominated for a judgeship in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

"We have requested the FBI to conduct an investigation of leaks concerning the Sporkin matter," Goodin said. "The highly detailed nature of it (the Times story) disturbed Thurmond. It involves the disclosure of classified government information. This is an extremely serious matter."

With Sen. Jeremiah Denton of Alabama reportedly leading the way, committee Republicans are concerned about alleged

improprieties by Sporkin during his tenure as CIA general counsel.

The panel held a closed hearing on the matter last week in a room equipped with anti-bugging devices and other security measures.

The Times story revealed that Denton was concerned about Sporkin's relationship with CIA intelligence officer Charles Waterman, who was fired from the agency for allegedly disclosing intelligence secrets to Middle Eastern business interests.

Denton's problem with the nomination reportedly centers on allegations that when Waterman's activities were uncovered and it appeared that he might be indicted, Sporkin helped him retain free legal counsel.

The CIA has confirmed that Sporkin advised Waterman to get a lawyer, but the agency has denied that Sporkin helped Waterman get a free one.

Denton spokesman Bob Hardy said yesterday the senator had not decided whether to support or oppose the nomination.

Denton aide Joel Lisker has been handling an investigation of the charges against Sporkin, but he, like Denton, refuses to discuss the matter.

Other committee staffers, citing the FBI probe, are similarly closemouthed.

Goodin said the leak to the Times may have come from outside the committee, but he noted that it occurred just after the classified information was passed from the core committee staff to the staffs of members.

He said it was unclear whether the FBI was close to finding the source of the leak. He also said it had not been determined what would happen to the guilty party if he or she were caught.

"That is something the FBI and the Justice Department would have to make a determination on later," Goodin said. "This is classified government information and those individuals ought to be punished. It's that simple."

The committee has scheduled another closed hearing on the Sporkin nomination for Thursday. Sporkin is expected to testify at that time.